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War in a Church-Historical Perspective

Introduction: Historical Perspectives

Evangelical Christians evince a somewhat equivocal attitude to the belief and practice of the Church in history — or tradition, as we might call it. Being biblical Christians we are resolved to place no ultimate confidence in it, or at least to place no confidence in it for matters of ultimate importance. If called upon to do so, we are ready to defy even a consensus universal in time and space in the interests of authentic biblical conviction. We would like Church history to be on our side, of course — some of us more than others. But we know enough to accept that this has not always been the case, even though we are rather uncomfortable if we have to conclude that it has rarely been so.

The question of the Christian attitude to war is one that finds us divided, to some extent along lines that were first drawn in the sixteenth century, although by now the divisions are no longer co-terminous with denominational boundaries — if we may so describe the splits between magisterial and radical Protestants during the Reformation. The very mention of *magisterial* Reformers reminds us that the disagreement between them and most of the Radicals about warfare was but one aspect of a much more comprehensive sixteenth-century quarrel, with its roots in such fundamental issues as the nature of the Church and its interaction with the society in which it was set, and the relation between Old and New Covenants.

What is not so often remembered is that basic differences of a somewhat similar kind undergirded that earlier parting of the ways on this issue of war, when the pacifism or anti-militarism of the first three centuries yielded to the just war and the holy war of the Christian empires from Constantine onwards. Whatever the truth in this summary account of the transition, arguably one of the most momentous in all Christian history, we will fail to do it justice unless we set it within the context of a much more far-reaching transformation of Christian thought and life. For example, one of the things that happened in the Constantinian generations was that the Old Testament began to come into its

own in the Christian Church. There took place what has been called a re-judaization of Christianity. Another development saw churchmen for the first time learning to adopt a political stance towards the government. If it is accurate to call the Church in the age of the martyrs pacifist, that pacifism was no timeless ethical construct which we may cite in support of our contemporary pacifisms. It has its locus first and foremost in particular historical circumstances, and has to be understood against that horizon before it can be made to yield guidelines for ours.

So in approaching these early centuries, let us exercise that degree of detachment which the importance we assign to Scripture should encourage us to show to the Church in every age. Church history is not a quest for heroes and villains. If we wish to claim a solidarity with any particular era or movement, let it be a reflectively critical one.

I. The Age of the Martyrs

Although the subject of early Christian attitudes to war and peace is well-trodden territory, no consensus can yet be said to prevail.¹ The reason for this probably lies in the tendency of scholars, partly at least under confessional pressures, to attempt to squeeze a complex body of evidence into the straitjacket of a simple explanation. I want to illustrate this complexity, and also to suggest that the Fathers by and large handle the question in religious rather than ethical terms.

Referring to the first three centuries as 'the age of the martyrs' reminds us that the Christians constituted a persecuted minority. More numerous in some parts of the Roman world than others and by no means incessantly persecuted, they nevertheless existed for the most part on the margins of society, not only

¹ For two recent surveys with good bibliography see J. Helgeland, 'Christians and the Roman Army from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine', and L. J. Swift, 'War and the Christian Conscience I: The Early Years', in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, II: *Principat*, edd. H. Temporini and W. Haase, Bd. 23:1 (Berlin, New York, 1979), 724-834, 835-868. It is instructive to compare the two. Helgeland is fuller but has more obvious weaknesses (see nn.2, 13, 20 below). Both claim idolatry was the main issue in primitive Christianity. For more pacifist approaches cf. R. H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* (Nashville, New York, 1960), 66-84; J. -M. Hornus, *It Is Not Lawful For Me To Fight*, revised edit., (Scottsdale, Pa., Kitchener, Ont., 1980), chh.3-5. The evidence collected by R. M. Grant, 'War — Just, Holy, Unjust — in Hellenistic and Early Christian Thought', *Augustinianum* 20, 1980, 173-189 (reprinted in his *Christian Beginnings: Apocalypse to History* (Collected Studies Series, 179; London, 1983), ch.X), is more concerned with the practice of war.

politically powerless but also with none but the most idealistic vision of a Christianization of society. One or two Fathers discerned providential significance in the fact that the rule of the emperors and the Christian religion began at roughly the same time, but even this, like virtually everything Christian writers said about Rome, was apologetic in inspiration. If these early Christians advocated pacifism, it was but one aspect of their non-engagement with a social context they judged largely alien, if not inimical, to Christian interests. Primitive Christian pacifism cannot be abstracted from a more general Christian detachment from the world in which they had to live — and die. This perspective is quite fundamental. There is no such thing in the age of the martyrs as the pacifism of the socially committed and politically activist Christian. Such a statement is not an indictment of these Christians, who existed under an autocracy which they experienced from time to time as the instigator of persecution which was executed by Roman soldiers and at root inspired by pagan Roman religion. Such experience did not lead the Christians to be anti-Roman. Indeed, the Christian apologies of this period are replete with protestations of loyalty to the empire, and with pleas to be treated as law-abiding, tax-paying, seriously religious citizens and residents of the empire. In a sense what they were pleading for was pluralism, for the Roman authorities to accept that Christians could be good Romans without observing the religious rites and traditions of Rome.

This set of circumstances is responsible for several particular features of early Christian comments on war and military service:

(a) *The Prominence of Idolatry as the Problem Facing Christians in the Roman Armies*

We must not foster the impression given by many Roman Catholic scholars on this subject that army religion, not shedding blood, was the sole objection to military service by Christians, but it does loom surprisingly large. It dominates the many references in the works of Tertullian, perhaps the most extensive early Christian writer on the subject and the only one to write a monograph on it, entitled *De Corona Militis, The Soldier's Crown (Garland, Chaplet)*. This brief treatise is a defence of a Christian soldier who refused, on the occasion of some parade for the distribution of an imperial bounty, to wear a laurel crown, on the grounds that it was incompatible with Christian faith, for such a crown had its home in idolatrous worship. It is somewhat more than half way through the work that Tertullian broaches the question

‘whether warfare is proper at all for Christians. What sense is there in discussing the merely accidental, when that on which it rests is to be condemned?’² Do we believe it lawful for a human oath (*sacramentum*) to be superadded to one divine, and for a man to come under promise to another master after Christ? . . . Shall it be lawful to make an occupation of the sword, when the Lord proclaims that he who uses the sword shall perish by the sword? And shall the son of peace take part in the battle when it does not become him even to sue at law? And shall he apply the chain, and the prison, and the torture, and the punishment, who is not the avenger even of his own wrongs? Shall he . . . either keep watch-service for others more than for Christ, or shall he do it on the Lord’s Day? . . . And shall he keep guard before the temples which he has renounced? . . . / . . . How many offences there are involved in the performance of camp duties which we must hold to involve a transgression of God’s law, you may see by a slight survey’ (11:1-4).

Noticeable in this indictment are not merely the range of considerations adduced by Tertullian but also the fact that ‘the sword’ is but one among many and is clearly interpreted in such a way as to exclude the enforcement by Christians of any kind of physical punishment, including imprisonment.

The conflict of loyalties posed for the Christian by the unconditional *sacramentum* of allegiance to the emperor, which was taken by soldiers on enlistment, and on every January 3rd. and anniversary of the emperor’s accession, is evident from the literature of military martyrdoms. These may be divided into two categories. First are the instances in which a recruit refuses to accept enlistment. Such was Maximilian in Roman North Africa in A.D. 295, who was executed for rejecting the military oath and the military seal.³ Maximilian’s own words in the *Acta* contain no reference to the activities of war, but only to the incompatibility of serving the emperor when he was already pledged to the service of Christ. The other category of soldier-martyr is the one who, after some time in the service, is brought to a critical juncture and faces a choice between life and death. Among these was another African, Marcellus, a centurion, who shortly before the end of the third century at Tingis (Tangiers) discarded his military belt on the occasion of ‘pagan festivities’ in celebration of the emperors’ birthday.⁴ Marcellus declared that ‘a Christian,

² Helgeland perversely claims that Tertullian is here saying that ‘the accidental’ is military life and the basic the wearing of the crown, rather than vice versa (*art. cit.*, 742-744).

³ H. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford Early Christian Texts; Oxford, 1972), 244-249.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 250-259. Helgeland is particularly interested in military martyrdoms (*art. cit.*, 777-782). Their importance is minimized by Hornus.

who fights for Christ his Lord, should not fight for the armies of this world . . . From now on I cease to serve your emperors and I despise the worship of your gods of wood and stone'. In this type of military martyrdom it is not normally conversion to Christianity that provokes the crisis, but some new departure, such as promotion, or some crystallization of conviction at a ceremony with religious overtones.

(b) *Double Standards:*

Christian Pacifism and Pagan Militarism Combined

Christian apologists, as we have seen, repeatedly protested Christian loyalty to the empire of Rome. Christians would not in any way render worship to the emperor, but they prayed for him and for his exercise of rule, and even for his success on the field of battle. This kind of self-defence is taken to its limit by Origen in his *apologia Contra Celsum*.⁵ Celsus had appealed to Christians to take their place in the imperial armies. His plea seems to reflect the knowledge that Christians normally did not enlist. Origen's rejoinder claims that the priestly intercession of the Christians on behalf of the emperor constitutes them 'a special army of piety' who are more effective than the troops at the frontline. Just as pagan priests were not enlisted, in order to 'keep their right hand undefiled for the sake of the sacrifices', so it is reasonable that,

'while others fight, Christians also should be fighting as priests and worshippers of God, keeping their right hands pure and by their prayers to God striving for those who fight in a righteous cause and for the emperor who reigns righteously, in order that everything which is opposed and hostile to those who act rightly may be destroyed' (8:73)

Thus Origen holds together a just war theory and a pacifist ethic, the link between them being the spiritual warfare waged by the religious exercises of the Christians. The offence of such an argument is that the bloody justice of battle and victory is for pagans to administer while Christians keep their hands clean. Notice here, then, another kind of religious consideration making for abstention from warfare — the concern with a ritual purity akin to that of the pagan priesthood. Behind such a sentiment in a few of the Fathers probably lies the influence of Pentateuchal safeguards for cultic purity, reinforced by the common

⁵ 8:69-70, 73-76. Cf. G. E. Gaspary, *Politics and Exegesis: Origen and the Two Swords* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1979), 127-134, with literature noted at 128 n.6.

misinterpretation of the prohibition of 'blood' in the so-called apostolic decree of Acts 15:20. Shedding of blood is consequently a ritual defilement as much as an ethical transgression.

Origen's reference to the justice of imperial warfare is not an isolated aberration in his thought. He discerned a providential role in the campaigns by which Rome unified the Mediterranean world and thus facilitated the diffusion of the gospel (2:30). Although Origen often allegorized the Israelite wars of the Old Testament and refused to believe that God intended the Jews to massacre their enemies (7:18, 22), he also accepted both that it was proper for Israel to act like a state with its own military forces and that in due time God had used the Romans to destroy the Israelite state by military might (7:26). Furthermore, when Celsus cites the ordered social lives of bees and ants to prove that in God's sight man is no better than irrational creatures, part of Origen's reply is to agree that the ants and the bees have lessons to teach us. 'Probably also in the so-called wars of the bees there lies teaching that among men wars, if they are ever necessary, are to be just and ordered' (4:81-82).

What emerges from this current of apologetic reasoning in Origen, which in my view has not been given sufficient prominence in the elucidation of early Christian teachings about war,⁶ is that most Christians felt the Roman empire to be in some way part of the providential order of things, which must also encompass the empire's wars. Even Tertullian declares himself ready to pray for 'whatever, as man or Caesar, an emperor would wish', including 'security to the empire, protection to the imperial house, and brave armies' (*Apol.* 30:4). Cyprian likewise, in the imperial crisis of the mid-third century, one of whose symptoms he perceived 'in the waste of soldiers and the diminution of forts', prays for 'the repulse of our (*i.e.*, the empire's) enemies' (*To Demetrianus* 17, 20). On a rather different note Tertullian could regard 'pestilence, and famine, and wars, and earthquakes . . . as a remedy' for overpopulation, 'as a means of pruning the luxuriance of the human race' (*The Soul* 30:4).

Linked to this feature of pre-Constantinian Christian writings may be the pervasive use of military imagery. The use of imagery from a particular theatre of life does not in itself imply approval. Christian writers employed metaphors from some of the forms of public entertainment in pagan society without ever suggesting that they were acceptable activities for Christians to take part in or watch. So some scholars would see no significance in wide-

⁶ Swift, *art. cit.*, 853-856, identifies the peril of 'a bifocal view . . . a double standard of morality' more clearly than Helgeland.

spread military analogies.⁷ It cannot be shown, for example, that a writer like Cyprian who made heavy use of such imagery was any more sympathetic to the waging of real war than others. Nevertheless there are occasions when metaphors are employed in such a way that an implication of endorsement seems difficult to avoid. This is how I am inclined to read a passage in *I Clement*:

‘Let us consider those who serve our generals, with what good order, habitual readiness, and submissiveness they perform their commands. Not all are prefects, nor tribunes, nor centurions, nor in charge of fifty men, or the like, but each carries out in his own rank the commands of the emperor and of the generals’ (37:2-3).

It is irrelevant that Clement has introduced a new rank into the Roman army from the LXX.⁸ His comments bespeak an *ex animo* identification with the military power of Rome. The same can be said of phrases in other writers from time to time. Harnack believed the incessant use of the imagery of warfare to denote the *militia Christi* exercised a subtly habituating effect on Christian minds, and paved the way for the welcome given to flesh-and-blood Christian armies in the fourth and subsequent centuries.⁹ By its very nature this is a hypothesis difficult to prove or disprove.

(c) *Limited Perspectives: Pastoral Counsel and Apologetic Objections, not Social Ethics*

It follows from what has been said so far that in the age of the martyrs, references in Christian sources to military service and war are predominantly pastoral when they are not apologetic. They bear upon the appropriate demeanour of Christians, and do not amount to an attempt to formulate a social ethic applicable also to the imperial power. Some occur in the catechetical literature, such as Hippolytus’ *Apostolic Tradition*, and discuss the variables involved in individual cases. No Christian would be expected to enlist voluntarily, but not every soldier converted in the army (for the Roman imperial forces were important channels of evangelistic dispersion) could be required to seek release.

⁷ Cf. R. MacMullen, *Soldier and Civilian in the Later Roman Empire* (Harvard Historical Monographs, 52; Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 163-167; Hornus, *op. cit.*, 68-79.

⁸ The ‘commander of fifty men’ probably comes from Ex. 18:21, 25 LXX.

⁹ Harnack, *Militia Christi: The Christian Religion and the Military in the First Three Centuries* (1905), tr. D. M. Gracie (Philadelphia, 1981), especially 52-61. The military images in Clement of Alexandria cited by Swift, *art. cit.*, 852 (which should be corrected to *Strom.* 4:4:14:4, 6:14:112:2, *Paid.* 1:7:54:2) fall short of implying endorsement of military activity.

The ordinary private was in a less exposed position than the officer, who would have to carry out religious rites and perhaps also capital punishments for disciplinary offences. The teachers of the Church counselled Christians with varying degrees of rigour, with a spectrum stretching from the more indulgent Clement of Alexandria via Hippolytus to the stringent Tertullian.¹⁰

The failure of pre-Constantinian Christianity to develop any kind of systematic ethical mind on these questions is illustrated by treatments of the wars of the Israelites. Writings from Acts (7:45, 13:19) and Hebrews (11:32-34) onwards identify themselves approvingly with Israel's military exploits. This appears almost instinctively, one feels, and should not surprise us in writers who, in apologetic interaction with Judaism, are claiming that the history of God's ancient people belongs to believing Christians, not to unbelieving Jews. But there is scarcely a suggestion that battles fought of old at God's behest could form a pointer to conduct becoming the new people of God. 'The general acceptance of Old Testament wars as an expression of God's will could not be incorporated into the Christian milieu without some difficulty.'¹¹ Tertullian's treatise on *Idolatry* alludes to what one assumes to have been an appeal by some Christians to the wars of Joshua in defence of Christian soldiery. His response was his well-known dictum: 'the Lord subsequently unbelted every soldier in disarming Peter' (19:2-3). Elsewhere he speaks of Joshua, who was a type of Christ, fighting his battles in the name of the Lord (*Against Marcion* 3:18:6).

But if the wars waged by Israel could not be applied, except spiritually to the race of Christians, nor could they yield any framework for understanding the wars of the Romans. With whatever degree of enthusiasm early Christian apologists lined up in prayer if not in deed behind the Roman legions, they do not seem to have thought of interpreting these recent wars in Old Testament terms, even though some Christian writers even before Constantine had begun to discern a providential role in

¹⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *Protrept.* 10:100 (cf. Bainton, *op. cit.*, 80: 'Plainly Clement did not call upon the Christian convert to leave the ranks', *pace* Hornus, *op. cit.*, 124-125); Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 16 ('A soldier who bears authority must be told not to kill anyone, and, if ordered to do so, to refuse. He must not take the military oath. If he will not agree, let him be rejected.' Likewise the military governor and magistrate must abandon their position. These stipulations regulate entry to the catechumenate.); Tertullian, *Idolatry* 19, refuses to allow a baptized Christian to become a soldier, or a soldier to be baptized.

¹¹ Swift, *art. cit.*, 840. On Origen cf. Gaspary, *op. cit.*, 18-39.

some achievements of Roman military power. No doubt we are at this point encountering the widespread uncertainty in the earliest Christian centuries about how to handle the Old Testament.

Some of our sources speak critically about the wars or the warlike nature of the Romans, but nearly always in connexion with a critique of Roman religion. Minucius Felix argues that Rome has deserved its worldwide dominion because it has been ready to honour the deities of all its conquered territories, and yet 'the Romans were so great not because they were religious, but because they were sacrilegious with impurity' (*Octavius* 6:1-3, 25:6). Another African apologist, Arnobius of Sicca, also voices criticism of Roman wars, but his 'distaste for war is part of a theological criticism of Roman religion; its inability to bring peace is evidence that the Roman religion is untrue'.¹² Arnobius takes this line partly because he is refuting pagan allegations that the Christians were 'the causes of frequent wars, the devastation of cities, the invasions of Germans and Scythians' (*Against the Pagans* 1:4). On the contrary, since the coming of Christ wars have been in great measure reduced by 'the repression of fierce passions' through his teaching (1:6). It is Mars and deities like him honoured by Rome that 'pile the fields with corpses, cause bloody torrents to flow, destroy the most firmly established empires and level cities to the ground' (3:26).

Yet another apologist from Roman Africa, Lactantius, in whose corpus we shall observe the transition of the ages of Christian history, comments disparagingly on the pride taken in military success among the Romans, and on the folly of imagining that 'brave and warlike generals are admitted to the assembly of the gods, and that there is no other way to immortality than to lead armies, to lay waste the territory of others, to destroy cities, to overthrow towns, to put to death or enslave free peoples' (*Div. Inst.* 1:18:8). In the main part of the *Divine Institutes* written before the 'Edict' of Milan, Lactantius even gives a summary of Israelite-Jewish history without mentioning the nation's military exploits (4:10:5-17).¹³ Elsewhere he seems to acknowledge that wars may be an inevitable necessity (5:17:13). But none of these writers was arguing that Rome should disband her legions and

¹² Helgeland, *art. cit.*, 757.

¹³ Helgeland's comment (759) illustrates nicely how different minds read a text in different ways: 'Lactantius was not embarrassed by the warlike activities recorded in the Old Testament. Without commenting on the apparent horror and destruction, he recounted the demise of the Egyptians pursuing Moses.' See further n.20 below.

auxiliary forces. Rather are they saying that the military front in Roman history and society illustrates the worship of false gods and the values of a distorted pride. Yet one can perceive in the Christian literature of this period, if not a formalized social ethic of war and peace, a commitment to the way of peace for Christian people.

(d) *A Pervasive but Ill-Focussed Vision of Peace*

The prophetic vision that many early Christian writers believed was being fulfilled in their day was that of Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-3. Justin cites it and adds the comment: 'we who formerly used to murder one another do not only now refrain from making war but also . . . willingly die confessing Christ' (*I Apol.* 39:2-3). 'We came in accordance with the commands of Jesus to beat the spiritual swords that fight and insult us into ploughshares, and to transform the spears that formerly fought against us into pruning-hooks. No longer do we take the sword against any nation, nor do we learn war any more, since we have become sons of peace through Jesus.' Such are the words of Origen (*Contra Celsum* 5:33); notice that even here he cannot take the text wholly in its straightforward sense — the 'spiritual' swords and spears to be turned to peace are not ours but our opponents! Origen also declared the literal meaning of 'turn the other cheek' 'most incredible, for every striker, unless he suffers from some unnatural defect, strikes the left cheek with his right hand' (*De Princ.* 4:3:18; cf. *Contra Celsum* 7:25).

For all his quirks of exegesis, it is Origen who comes nearest to offering a serious Christian alternative to the Roman way of war. When Celsus challenged him to say what would happen to the defence of the empire if the whole population became Christian, Origen placed his confidence in the efficacy of Christian prayer:

'What must we think if it is not only, as now, just a few who agree but all the Roman Empire? For they will be praying to the Logos who in earlier times said to the Hebrews when they were being pursued by the Egyptians: "The Lord will fight for you, and you shall keep silence." And if they pray with complete agreement they will be able to subdue many more pursuing enemies than those that were destroyed by the prayer of Moses when he cried to God and by the prayer of his companions . . . If as Celsus suggests all the Romans were convinced and prayed, they would be superior to their enemies, or would not even fight wars at all, since they would be protected by divine power which is reported to have preserved five entire cities for the sake of fifty righteous men' (8:69-70).

James Moffatt commented that 'Origen propounds a holy

experiment which had no relation to the moral order or to the actual situation of the Empire'.¹⁴ That is a less than sympathetic judgement. Origen's remedy for Roman militarism was the gradual Christian transformation of the population into an army of pray-ers, who by their prayers would destroy the demons that provoke wars (8:73). Such a vision was no doubt idealistic but none the less noble for all that.

Even if no one spelt out the Christian answer as starkly as Origen (for no one posed the challenge as sharply as Celsus), it is not difficult to find similar sentiments in other writings. 'We who were filled with war and mutual slaughter and every wickedness', says Justin Martyr, 'have each through the whole earth changed our warlike weapons — our swords into ploughshares, and our spears into instruments of tillage, and we cultivate piety, righteousness, philanthropy, faith and hope' (*Dial.* 110). But when we look for an articulated ethical case against engaging in warfare on the grounds that killing is wrong, the results are disappointing. We can collect remarks made *en passant*, isolated statements in rather generalized terms, *membra disiecta* but no sustained argument. A manual of ethical instruction like Clement of Alexandria's *Paidagogus* scarcely touches the subject.

Perhaps the most explicit utterance is that of Lactantius (who was shortly to change his mind, with the emergence of Constantine):

'When God forbids us to kill, he not only prohibits us from open violence, which is not even allowed by the public laws, but he warns us against the commission of those things which are esteemed lawful among men. Thus it will be neither lawful for a just man to engage in warfare, since his warfare is justice itself, nor to accuse anyone of a capital charge, because it makes no difference whether you put a man to death by word, or rather by the sword . . . It is always unlawful to put to death a man, whom God willed to be a sacred animal' (*Div. Inst.* 6:20:15-17).

Other passages in the same work give a clearer shape to Lactantius's viewpoint. 'The just man is neither at enmity with any human being, nor desires anything at all which is the property of another . . . Why should he carry on war, and mix himself with the passions of others, when his mind is engaged in perpetual peace with men?' (5:17:12). 'If God only were worshipped, there would not be dissensions and wars, since men would

¹⁴ 'War', in J. Hastings, ed., *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church* (Edinburgh, 1915-1918), vol.2, 644-673 at 666.

know that they are the sons of one God' (5:8:6). When philosophers speak 'of the duties relating to warfare, all that discourse is accommodated neither to justice nor to true virtue, but to this life and civil institutions' (6:6:19). I take it to be a fair comment that Lactantius's strict pacifism is more 'philosophical and humanitarian' than biblically Christian.¹⁵

Much more could be said about the stances Christians adopted toward war and military activity in the age of the martyrs, but enough has probably been said to show that any analysis has to be a differentiated one. No equation can be made between war, killing and military service. Tertullian makes no allowance for a Christian to serve as a soldier even when there is no risk of shedding blood, because for him any religion was the overriding factor.¹⁶ Conversely, a firm stand on 'You shall not kill' need not lead to a demand that all Christians keep out of or leave the forces. The prohibition of killing is rarely if ever applied solely to warfare; it often includes, for example, the infliction of capital punishment. The same arguments that lead Tertullian and Origen to close army service to Christians issue in the same conclusion with regard to the holding of civil office.¹⁷

There is also the undoubted fact that from at least c.170 onwards Christians were to be found serving under Roman standards. The evidence is in my view irrefutable, even if it cannot be quantified.¹⁸ The 'legend' of the Thundering Legion, the accounts of military martyrdoms, epitaph inscriptions of Christian soldiers, records of the beginnings of the Great Persecution and the statements of writers like Tertullian himself put the issue beyond doubt. 'Christians in the late third century [and earlier] had an answer for Celsus, an answer which was anathema to Origen.'¹⁹ Military service offered attractive incentives, especially for those non-citizens who joined the auxiliary forces and at their

¹⁵ Swift, *art. cit.*, 858. Cf. *Div. Inst.* 6:11:2, 'Discord and dissension are not in accord with the nature of man; and that expression of Cicero is true, which says that man, while he is obedient to nature, cannot injure man'.

¹⁶ *Idolatry* 19:1.

¹⁷ Tertullian, *Idolatry* 17:2-3; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8:75: 'If Christians do avoid these responsibilities, it is not with the motive of shirking the public services of life. But they keep themselves for a more divine and necessary service in the church of God.'

¹⁸ It is well discussed by Helgeland, *art. cit.*, 765-797.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 797. The incidental nature of the evidence is telling. The Christian soldier in Tertullian's *De Corona* who refused the laurel crown was not followed by his fellow Christian soldiers (1:4). Maximilian could be urged to enlist because other Christians were already serving (ed. Musurillo, *op. cit.*, 246-247).

discharge could expect citizenship, a grant of land and a pension. There was even some Christian literature which glorified violence. The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* depicted a Jesus who even as a young boy did others to death at the drop of a hat. More significant in my judgement was the growing involvement of Christians in pagan society, which made the policy of detachment advocated by Tertullian and Origen increasingly inadequate. The way had been prepared for the Constantinian revolution long enough in advance for the phrase to be something of a misnomer.

II. Holy War and Just War in the Christian Empire

As we have hinted, the transition in Christian viewpoint can be traced in the sequence of Lactantius's writings.²⁰ Final additions to the *Divine Institutes*, as well as his *Epitome* of this work and *The Death of the Persecutors* were all produced after Constantine's victory and early indulgence of the interests of the Church. At last Christian writers had found a warrior and a campaign which they could heartily endorse. What is clear in Lactantius is writ blindingly large in Eusebius. The latter's fullblown eulogies of Constantine are anticipated more briefly in the added prologue and epilogue to Lactantius's *Divine Institutes* (1:1:13-16, 7:27:2). The application of 'You shall not kill' in the *Epitome* of this work omits the reference to warfare found in the full text (59[64]:5), and the same writer in *The Deaths of the Persecutors* tells us that Constantine went into battle with the name of Christ on the shields of his troops (44:5), and celebrates the successes of Constantine and Licinius as the *triumphus Dei* and *victoria Domini* (52:4). The ease and speed with which Lactantius and then Eusebius turned the tables on earlier attitudes confirm the interpretation that any pre-Constantinian consensus was basically religious rather than ethical. Hence when the Christians welcomed an emperor on their side, so that they could recognize his victories as for the good of the Church, they no longer had any principled reason to keep their distance from the wars of Rome. Corroboration of this viewpoint is to be found in the fact that what these early apologists of the Christian empire propound is not a just war theory but a holy war theology, in which the issue lies between the people of God and the enemies of God.

²⁰ On this see Swift, 857-860, in preference to Helgeland's less satisfactory account, 758-759. In his *Epitome* 41(46):6-8 Lactantius declares that Vespasian's destruction of Jerusalem was 'accomplished by God on account of Christ's crucifixion' and in accordance with prophecy.

This Eusebian territory is at once more accessible and familiar and less controverted than the ground we have covered so far. I wish to make only a few brief points.

(a) *The Military Commander*

Constantine as Roman emperor was *ex officio* the military supremo of the Roman armies. Nor was this a titular or ceremonial office. The emperor regularly led his troops into battle. The ruler who now patronized the Christian Church was the most important soldier in the world. In welcoming his victories and the cessation of persecution and granting of relief measures to the Church, Christians could scarcely separate off his civil office from his military function and achievements.

(b) *A Military Convert and Christian*

The very context and perhaps spur of Constantine's adhesion to Christianity was success in battle. We can leave on one side the detailed historicity of visions and dreams, and still be in no doubt that the victory at the Milvian Bridge was ascribed by Constantine to the help of the God of the Christians. Christian writers had no hesitation in propagating this version of events. Not only so the conversion; his dominant religious sentiments as a Christian also cast his relationship to God in terms of indebtedness, dependence and obligation towards a God who bestowed victory in war and prosperity in peace. God was a God of battles — in categories owing as much to Roman pagan religion as to the Old Testament.

(c) *The Holy War against Licinius*

Eusebius depicts Constantine's final campaign against Licinius in the East unambiguously as a holy war. It was his 'pious and holy task' to liquidate Licinius (*Life of Constantine* 2:3). The 'saving trophy' of the labarum always preceded the troops into battle. Constantine was accompanied by 'the priests of God' to increase the efficiency of prayer, and he took with him a portable church-tent. It was while praying and meditating in this tabernacle that he received the divine impulse to engage with the enemy, rushed from his knees to give the order to draw swords and was soon raising the trophies of victory over his foes (2:7, 12). The pretext for this sacralization of Constantine's war against Licinius was the latter's resumption of harassment of the Christian Church in the East. Whatever the scale of this, there is no doubt that in the build-up to the showdown between the two emperors, the Chris-

tians had become pawns in the contest for supremacy. There were, of course, many more Christians in Licinius's eastern half of the empire. Eusebius's interpretation is clear. Constantine was fighting for the Church, and Licinius for the traditional religion of Rome. Constantine was the new Moses, similarly reared 'in the very palaces and bosoms of the oppressors' of God's people and raised up 'to become their destroyer' (*Life* 1:12). The discomfiture of the forces of Maxentius while crossing the Tiber was a re-enactment of the drowning of Pharaoh and his hosts in the Red Sea, provoking the response, 'Let us sing unto the Lord, for he has been glorified exceedingly . . . Who is like unto you, O Lord, among the gods?' (1:38).

So the first systematic Christian theology of war presents us with the holy war. Most of Rome's wars in the next two or three centuries could similarly qualify as those of a Christian ruler and population against the enemies of Christ — pagans or heretics, *i.e.*, Persians and migrating barbarian tribes who were in part Arianized. One recent definition has distinguished the holy war as a war fought for the goals of the faith, on divine authority or the authority of a religious leader. If the leader is a church official, it becomes a crusade. Christian participation in such a war is a duty.²¹ Constantine's campaigns as orchestrated by Eusebius may not wholly satisfy the terms of this definition, but they come close enough to doing so. Such a framework of understanding may help us to make sense of canon 3 of the Council of Arles in 314, which is one of the most debated items of evidence in the whole field. The canon decrees that 'those who throw down their arms in time of peace should be debarred from communion'. No interpretation is without its difficulties, but it may well be that the bishops, in recognition of the new 'time of peace' for the Church that Constantine had ushered in, were keen to prevent Christian soldiers, offended still at the army's official religion which would change only slowly, opting out in the new situation in which the penalties for doing so might be less severe than before.²²

(d) *From Holy War to Just War*

However revolutionary Eusebian political theology must appear,

²¹ F. H. Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, Third Series, 8; Cambridge, 1975), 2. Cf. H. Buchanan, 'Luther and the Turks 1519-1529', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 47, 1956, 145-160, at 146-147.

²² Cf. Helgeland, *art. cit.*, 805-806.

the outlook of the Church at large was not transformed overnight. If soon after mid-century Athanasius could say in a letter, 'It is not right to kill, yet in war it is lawful and praiseworthy to destroy the enemy' (*Letter to Amoun*), twenty years later Basil the Great was more guarded: 'Homicide in war our fathers did not consider as homicide — making a concession, in my opinion, to those who fight in defence of moral discipline and religion. But perhaps it is well to advise that men with unclean hands abstain from communion for three years' (*Letter* 188:13). Already Eusebius had implied that 'giving orders to soldiers fighting for right' was not for those who followed 'the perfect form of the Christian life' — presumably clergy and ascetics (*Demonstr. Evangel.* 1:8).

But the dominant track followed by Christian thinking in the fourth century had been set by Eusebian Constantinianism. 'A Christian empire and a Christian army defending the nucleus of the civilized world against heretics and vandals created an atmosphere more favourable to the conception of a holy war waged by a Chosen People than did a pagan empire persecuting a Christian minority'.²³ Eusebius tells us that Constantine restricted promotion to high military rank to Christians (*Life* 4:52), and less than a century later, in 416, Theodosius II debarred pagans altogether from the army (*Codex Theodos.* 16:10:21).²⁴ Against this tradition that identified the empire's wars with the cause of Christianity, it was the achievement of two Latin Fathers, Ambrose in part and Augustine more thoroughly, to deliver Christian teaching from Eusebian triumphalism and subject it to the more disciplined conception of the just war. If there is a powerful new factor at work in this development, it is the undisguised adoption of secular classical thought on the subject, most obvious in Ambrose's dependence on Cicero's *De Officiis* in his own work of the same title.²⁵ In Augustine's discussions of war there is greater originality, especially in his attempt to accommodate the pacifist

²³ John Eppstein, *The Catholic Tradition of the Law of Nations* (London, 1935), 65.

²⁴ 'Those persons who are polluted by the profane false doctrines or crime of pagan rites, that is, the pagans, shall not be admitted to the imperial service.'

²⁵ Aristotle first used the expression 'just war', of warfare 'used both against wild beasts and against such men as are by nature intended to be ruled over but refuse', i.e., barbarians (*Politics* I, 1256 B). It was Cicero who fashioned from traditional materials, both Greek and Roman, the dominant concept of the just war in imperial Rome. 'We must resort to force only if we may not settle a dispute by discussion. The only excuse, therefore, for going to war is that we may live in peace unharmed; and when the victory is won, we should spare those who have not been blood-thirsty and barbarous in warfare . . . We must also ensure protection to those who lay down their arms . . . No war is

sentiments of earlier Christian tradition. Nevertheless it is a sobering thought that not until Christian thinking exposed itself to the best of pagan wisdom did it succeed in distancing itself from the baneful legacy of Eusebianism.

(e) *Ambrose's Compound of Old Testament
and Classical Tradition*

Ambrose's statements on war often do not suggest much advance on Eusebius, although he makes much more use than the latter of Old Testament materials. When Ezekiel spoke of Gog and Magog, he foresaw the Gothic invaders. So when the emperor Gratian was about to set off to repel them, Ambrose assured him, in a handbook on *The Christian Faith* that he dedicated to him, of the victory 'promised of old time and foretold in oracles given by God' through Ezekiel.²⁶ He then sets out a prayer: 'No military eagles, no flights of birds here lead the van of our army but your name, Lord Jesus, and your worship. This is no land of unbelievers, but the land whose custom it is to send forth confessors . . . Show forth now a plain sign of your majesty that he who believes you to be the true Lord of hosts and captain of the armies of heaven, he who believes that you are the true power and wisdom of God, no being of time or creation, . . . may, upheld by the aid of your supreme might win the prize of victory for his faith' (2:16:142). Note how to pray for success in battle against an Arian enemy!

Such sentiments have provoked one scholar into saying that Ambrose 'desired a sort of perpetual holy war motivated by the bellicose virtues of Joshua and the Maccabees, who had fought for God and their rights'.²⁷ Unlike Joshua, however, Christian clergy were to be exempt (*De Officiis* 1:35:175). Yet Ambrose knew and cited his Cicero. 'The courage which protects one's country in

just, unless it is entered upon after an official demand for reparation has been submitted or warning has been given and a formal declaration made . . . The man who is not legally a soldier has no right to be fighting the foe . . . When a war is fought for supremacy and when glory is the object of war, it must still not fail to start from the same motives . . . Those wars which have glory for their end must be carried on with less bitterness . . . If under stress of circumstances individuals have made any promise to the enemy, they are bound to keep their word' (*De Officiis* 1:11:34-13:39); 'A war is never undertaken by the perfect state except in defence of its honour or its safety . . . Those wars are unjust which are undertaken without provocation. For only a war waged for revenge or defence can actually be just' (*De Republica* 3:23:34-35).

²⁶ *The Christian Faith* 2:16:136-138.

²⁷ Russell, *op. cit.*, 14, referring to Ambrose, *De Officiis* 1:40:195-198 (in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* translation, 205-208); *cf.* 1:28:135, 35:175, 3:8:54-56.

war against the incursions of barbarians or defends the weak at home or one's friends from the attacks of robbers is absolutely just.²⁸ 'Courage without justice is the source of wickedness . . . In matters of war one ought to see whether the war is just or unjust' (1:35:176). 'There is nothing wrong in bearing arms; but to bear arms from motives of rapine is a sin indeed.'²⁹ In naming his classical sources — Aristotle, Panaetius and Cicero (1:36), Ambrose claimed that they derived their rules of war from the Old Testament, whose precedents in the end seemed to weigh more heavily with him. He offers nothing approaching an ordered conception of justice in war but rather 'an unstable amalgam of examples of Old Testament wars and Roman morality'.³⁰ So in the midst of his analysis of the Roman virtue of *fortitudo*, he praises David who 'never waged war unless he was driven to it', and after defeating Goliath 'never entered on a war without seeking counsel of the Lord' (1:35). Ambrose's Romano-Christian notion of acceptable war did not escape confusing justice with morality and true religion as valid grounds for waging war.

(f) *Augustine: the Just and Mournful War*

In a recent article Robert Markus has illustrated the context in Augustine's changing thought-world of his views of war, although his actual views underwent little change.³¹ Augustine lived through the first unmistakable symptoms of the break-up of Roman power in the West, and his own perspective on the empire experienced also a significant change of direction.³² Until about 400, Augustine believed he was living in *Christiana tempora*, an age of the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy in the Christian empire of Constantine, Eusebius and Theodosius. In moderated form, Augustine was for some years a Eusebian, who saw in the Christianizing of the Roman world an advance in the earthly realization of the kingdom of God. By the time of the *City of God* he has moved towards a more pessimistic, or at best ambivalent, estimate of the institutions of earthly society, Roman or otherwise, and now locates the full realization of the 'city of God' firmly in the other-worldly and eschatological future. In

²⁸ *De Officiis* 1:27:129.

²⁹ Cited without reference by J. F. Bethune-Baker, *The Influence of Christianity on War* (Cambridge, 1888), 37. See also *De Officiis* 1:29:139-141.

³⁰ Russell, *op. cit.*, 15.

³¹ 'Saint Augustine's Views on the "Just War"', in *The Church and War* (*Studies in Church History*, 20; Oxford, 1983), ed. W. J. Shiels, 1-13.

³² Cf. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge, 1970), chh.2-3.

Markus's language, Augustine has secularized the history of Rome, pagan and Christian. The *City of God* has remarkably little to say about the development of imperial Rome, even Christian imperial Rome. Augustine thus succeeds where Ambrose failed, in fashioning a concept of the just war which did not depend on Rome, whether Christian or not.

But Augustine's first and most extended justification of war comes before 400 in his lengthy refutation of the Manichaean Faustus. Here he has to defend Moses, vindicate the God who in the Old Testament ordered his people to war and demonstrate the harmony of Old and New Testaments. The very starting-point is noteworthy when contrasted with pre-Constantinian Christian tradition. None of those earlier writers would have wanted to attempt the task Augustine set himself. His most explicit definition of the just war is found in his *Questions on the Heptateuch* written c.419, but it gathers up the thrust of this earlier discussion:

'Just wars are normally defined as wars which avenge wrongs, when some nation or community has to be warred upon for failing to redress criminal action by its citizens or restore what has been wrongfully seized. But there is also another kind of war which is undoubtedly just, namely, the war commanded by God (*bellum Deo auctore*), in whom there is no injustice, who knows each man's due. In such a war the military commander or the people itself is to be deemed not so much the author as the instrument of war'

(6:10).

In *Contra Faustum* it is very much the *bellum Deo auctore* which Augustine has to defend, but he does so without the note of triumphalism found in Ambrose. There is no glory in war for Augustine.

'What is the evil in war? Is it the death of some who will soon die in any case, that others may live in peaceful subjection? . . . The real evils in war are love of violence, revengeful cruelty, fierce and implacable enmity, wild resistance, and the lust of power, and such like; and it is generally to punish these things, when force is required to inflict the punishment, that, in obedience to God or some lawful authority, good men undertake wars . . .'

(*Contra Faustum* 22:74).

Wars are undertaken to punish or avenge. All war is the fruit of sin, or the remedy or penalty for sin. Whereas Cicero's definition gave a prominent place to 'recovery of losses', Augustine's central concern is the 'avenging of wrongs'.

Much of the interest of this passage in *Contra Faustum* focusses

on the attempt to harmonize Old and New Testaments. Augustine uses NT texts for two purposes.³³ First, they show that Christ and the apostles did not forbid warfare. John the Baptist did not tell soldiers to desert; the tribute-money to be 'rendered to Caesar' was 'given on purpose to pay the soldiers required for war'; the centurion was praised for his faith, not told to leave the service. But secondly, statements that apparently conflict with the Old Testament point not to the outward action but to the inward disposition. As he advised Marcellinus, a prominent Roman official troubled by objections like those raised by Celsus, 'These precepts [in the Sermon on the Mount] pertain rather to the internal disposition of the heart than to the actions which are done in the sight of men . . . Many things must be done in correcting with a certain benevolent severity, even against their own wishes, men whose welfare rather than their wishes it is our duty to consult . . . Even wars themselves will not be carried on without the benevolent design that, after the resisting nations have been conquered, provision may be more easily made for enjoying in peace the mutual bond of piety and justice' (*Epistle* 138:13, 14). This is all of a piece with Augustine's justification of the coercion of heretics and his much-misquoted dictum, 'Love and do what you will'.³⁴ One might paraphrase his meaning as 'Though I slay him, yet do I love him'! In fact, although they rest on much the same bases, Augustine does not seem to have linked the waging of war and the coercion of heretics.

Already in *Contra Faustum* the note is heard that 'the whole mortal life of man upon earth is a trial' (22:78). This becomes more pronounced in his later writings, and the language of necessity is often applied to war. Its role is to keep disorder under control. The *City of God* harshly criticizes Rome's expansionist wars, for war is never justified for national self-aggrandisement. 'Human affairs would have been in a happier state' with a multitude of small kingdoms in the world. 'To make war and to extend the realm by crushing other peoples, is good fortune in the eyes of the wicked; to the good, it is a stern necessity.' It is true that Rome has imposed on her conquered peoples her language as 'a bond of peace and fellowship', but 'think of the cost of this achievement! Consider the scale of those wars, with all that slaughter of human beings, all the human blood that was shed! When peace, which is the objective of all

³³ *Contra Faustum* 22:74, 76; cf. *Epistle* 189:4, 6.

³⁴ Cf. J. Gallay, 'Dilige et quod vis fac. Notes d'exégèse augustinienne', *Rech. de Science Relig.* 43, 1955, 545-555.

just warfare, is attained, that is surely cause for rejoicing, but if that inferior earthly peace is not accompanied by the peace of the heavenly city, 'the inevitable consequence is fresh misery, and an increase of the wretchedness already there'. And so 'the very extent of the empire has given rise to wars of a worse kind, namely, social and civil wars'.³⁵

One more passage from the *City of God* sets the authentically Augustinian tone to the discussion of war:

'The wise man, they say, will wage just wars. Surely, if he remembers that he is a human being, he will rather lament the fact that he is faced with the necessity of waging just wars; for if they were not just, he would not have to engage in them, and consequently there would be no wars for a wise man. For it is the injustice of the opposing side that lays on the wise man the duty of waging wars; and this injustice is assuredly to be deplored by a human being, since it is the injustice of human beings, even though no necessity for war should arise from it. And so everyone who reflects with sorrow on such grievous evils in all their horror and cruelty, must acknowledge the misery of them. And yet a man who experiences such evils, or even thinks about them, without heartfelt grief, is assuredly in a far more pitiable condition, if he thinks himself happy simply because he has lost all human feeling' (19:7).

Thus for the old Augustine war had become one of the tragic necessities of life. The reasons for this have to do not only with his ever-deepening awareness of the corruptness of humankind but also with his remarkable disengagement of the fortunes of the city of God from those of the earthly city of Rome. On these grounds I think it inconceivable that Augustine could have regarded any contemporary war as *bellum Deo auctore*. Even in *Contra Faustum*, where he could not deny that modern war was ever *bellum Deo auctore* without defeating his chief purpose, there is no suggestion that he is making this claim for any war subsequent to the Old Testament.

Medieval Christian theorists were unequal to the task of maintaining the subtlety and complexity of Augustine's presentation. It is easy enough to see how it could be made to lead to various consequences that would have been anathema to Augustine. Although he could be said to have taken early Christian pacifism

³⁵ *City of God* 4:15, 19:7, 15:4, 19:7. Grant, *art. cit.* (n.1 above), 176 refers to these and other passages (1:2, 21, 3:10, 19:12, 17) as 'authentically Ciceronian discussions of just war', which is less than the whole truth. For discussions see Russell, *op. cit.*, 16-26; Tooke, *op. cit.* (n.37 below), ch.1; H. A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York, London, 1963), esp. ch.5; Eppstein, *op. cit.*, 65-81.

with a greater seriousness than anyone after Constantine, his disjunction of outward act from interior attitude was bound to prove fateful beyond telling. Furthermore, Augustine broadened the basis for just warfare, because he could not help linking human justice with divine justice. To that extent he tends to shift the criteria from the legal or juridical to the moral, with an expanded concept of war guilt. The moral order of society is at stake for Augustine, even if he entertains little hope for human society beyond the control of the ravages of sin. Yet in the end of the day there is a sombre realism in his exposition which is corrective of both major phases of Christian reflection considered so far — the sombre mood rebuking holy-war triumphalism, and the Roman realism abandoning without disrespect the pacifist detachment of the earliest centuries. If Augustine's synthesis of pre- and post-Constantinian Christian traditions ultimately fails to carry conviction, at least exegetically, he has the merit of seeking to stand in relation to both. Of no one else in the formative era of Christian just war theory was that true.

III. After Augustine: Medieval War and Crusade

If this survey were to terminate with Augustine it would not be an arbitrary stopping-point, for Augustine's observations were the fountain-head of all discussion of war in medieval Christendom in the West. Although the theory of the just war underwent considerable refinement and systematization, it is arguable that nothing fundamentally new was added. The advance was in sophistication of statement rather than moral or theological perception. One of the most elaborate theoretical constructs was that of Alexander of Hales in the thirteenth century:

'In order to determine if a war is just or unjust you must mark the authority (*auctoritas*), the state of mind (*affectus*), the intention (*intentio*), the condition (*conditio*), the desert (*meritum*), and the cause (*causa*). The state of mind and the authority must be considered in the person of him who declares war; the condition and intention in the person of him who wages war; the desert in the person of him who is warred upon; the cause in the person of him for whom the war is waged.'³⁶

Later in the same century Thomas Aquinas dealt with war in his *Summa Theologica*. A recent standard treatment of his

³⁶ *Summa Theologica* III:466, cited by Jonathan Barnes, 'The Just War', in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, edd. N. Kretzmann et. al. (Cambridge, 1982), 771-784 at 773.

thought on this subject avers that 'the importance of the doctrine of the just war in Aquinas is due rather to his general eminence and that of the *Summa Theologica* in which it appears than to any original or outstanding treatment or exposition of the subject by him'.³⁷ The same author concludes her examination with a more sustained criticism:

'Aquinas's direct teaching on war is slight and unoriginal. Derived more or less wholesale from Augustine and Gratian, it is abstract and theoretical, and inspired by no personal emotion or thought. It is related neither to contemporary political and ecclesiastical conditions nor to the rest of his thought. It is dealt with in a treatise on charity, but is considered as a problem of justice . . . Neither his natural reasoning, nor his consideration of the ethical and political issues involved, nor his reconciliation of just warfare with Christianity was . . . at all complete or adequate . . . He did not discriminate between offensive and defensive war, he allowed authority to declare war to "any public person", well knowing the superiority of the imperial and papal power in his day, and he regarded the limited "common good" of a province or nation as sufficient justification. He omitted to state that war could only be just if it were a last resort.'³⁸

Aquinas's consideration never mentions the crusade, that low-water mark of medieval Christian warfare which reminds us of the predominance of versions of the holy war over the just war for much of the period. It was one of the achievements of the scholastic tradition of just war theories, which may be held to begin with Gratian's *Decretum* in the twelfth century and to have reached its climax in the early seventeenth century with Hugo Grotius's *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* (1625), that it excluded the holy war, the *bellum Deo auctore*, from the precincts of the just war. Indeed, in its 'final flowering' in Grotius,³⁹ the just war belongs to international law, now conclusively severed from theology.

'After Augustine' in the West means effectively 'after the Roman empire'. As migrant barbarians dismantled the dominion of Rome, so war as a social institution fought to some extent within accepted conventions entered into a decline. The conversion of these new European populations to orthodox Christianity entailed also the greater militarization of the Christian religion, although Peter Brown's comment is worth pondering: 'It was the intolerance of the "respectable" catholicism of the later fourth century which kept the barbarian

³⁷ Joan D. Tooke, *The Just War in Aquinas and Grotius* (London, 1965), 25. On Aquinas see also Russell, *op. cit.*, ch.7, for a more positive assessment.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 170.

³⁹ Barnes, *art. cit.*, 772. On Grotius see Tooke, *op. cit.*

kingdoms "barbaric".⁴⁰ From Eusebius and Ambrose onwards, the Church debarred clergy and monks from the army, in this respect as in others perpetuating the more rigorous standards of pre-Constantinian Christianity in the élite religion of the clerical and monastic estates. Yet even this requirement proved difficult to maintain in the disordered social conditions of barbarian Europe, as popes, bishops and others found themselves fulfilling varied military and diplomatic roles.

Out of the turmoil of these early medieval centuries the kingdom of the Franks emerged as the nucleus of a new Holy Roman Empire. Yet Charlemagne, that '*Christianissimus rex*', produced a novel hybrid variety of Christian war, the missionary war. Charlemagne's subjugation of the Saxons coupled imperial conquest and Christianization. He resolved to 'attack the perfidious and truce-breaking nation of the Saxons in war, and would persevere therein until they were either conquered and made subject to the Christian religion or were altogether swept off the face of the earth' — so ran his plan for one of his campaigns.⁴¹ Military victory was followed by enforced mass baptism. Lonely were the voices of churchmen raised in protest rather than felicitation.

One of the indispensable features of all just war theory was the insistence that war could only be declared by recognized authority. This was difficult to implement in a world of warring factions and feuding chieftains and princes. Nor was the situation much clearer under the Holy Roman Emperors. By strict principle only imperial authority could declare a just war, but such a doctrine had taken leave of political realities.

So on various fronts Christian leaders and teachers struggled to bring order back into the waging of war. In its own way feudalism limited indisciplined, casual warfare, by making it the monopoly of the privileged few. Within the Church developments like the Peace of God and the Truce of God in the tenth and eleventh centuries sought to establish what might be called religious Geneva conventions for military activity. Yet the Truce of God was confirmed at the very synod that was summoned to launch the first crusade. The name of this ultimate form of holy war was taken from the crucifixion. Under its banner, with the aid of the burgeoning indulgence system, war against the infidel became one of the most meritorious ways of Christian life. The crusades also represented the final conversion of war into an

⁴⁰ *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine* (London, 1972), 54.

⁴¹ Cited by T. Hodgkin, *Charles the Great* (London, 1897), 109.

instrument of the purposes of the Church. When Luther came to think about the war against the Turks in the sixteenth century, he found it difficult to escape the dark, haunting spectre of the crusades, which in the religious sphere had heaped up much of that baleful legacy against which his first protests were directed.

IV. Luther and Calvin

It may well be the case that neither Luther's nor Calvin's views on war are either markedly original or of any special importance in the history of Christian thought on this subject. In Luther's case, it was the way he implemented his convictions, chiefly in the suppression of the Peasants' Revolt but also more interestingly in the war against the Turks, that made history. His treatise *Whether Soldiers Too Can Be Saved* (1526) is traditional in content if not without characteristically Lutheran notes.⁴² The divine institution of the sword to punish wrong is 'powerful and sufficient proof that war and killing along with all the things that accompany wartime and martial law have been justified by God'. In addition to Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2:13-14, scriptural support is got from John the Baptist, who 'praised the military profession', Jesus before Pilate ('If my kingship were of this world, then my servants would fight . . .', John 18:36; Christ hereby 'admitted that war was not wrong') and 'all the stories of war in the Old Testament'. His two-kingdoms schema releases him from any pressure to evade the force of the Sermon on the Mount, which does indeed hold true of Christians who are governed by the Spirit. Luther discusses a number of issues posed to him. He excludes rebellion against legitimate government, however debased its conduct, but allows soldiers to participate in wars waged by rulers against their own rebellious subjects. Finally, because military service is no saving good work, the soldier must trust in God and draw his sword. Luther both affirms rulers as God's appointed executors of the sword and qualifies their position as sinners in a sinful world.

In his *Explanations of the Ninetyfive Theses*, in which Luther questioned much of the religious apparatus undergirding crusading militarism, he argued that 'to fight against the Turk is the same as resisting God, who visits our sin upon us with this rod'.⁴³ This was one of his heretical statements condemned in the papal

⁴² Translated by C. M. Jacobs and R. C. Schultz in *Luther's Works*, vol.46 (Philadelphia, 1967), 87-137. See 95, 97-98, 99, 103-118, 125-127, 135-136.

⁴³ Tr. C. W. Folkemer in *Luther's Works*, vol.31 (1957), 91-92.

bull of excommunication in 1520. It led to accusations that Luther was even responsible for the advance of the Turks.⁴⁴ Despite such allegations Luther did not clarify his position until 1529, when he published *On War Against the Turk*.⁴⁵ Here he denied that he was opposed to a legitimate war against the Turkish invaders. The emperor was the one who should wage such a war, for his subjects have been wrongfully attacked and 'it is his duty, as a regular ruler appointed by God, to defend his own'. Christian people should therefore support the emperor in resisting the Turks. But Luther is as adamantly opposed as ever to a papal crusade against them. Not only does this involve 'a horrible confusion of callings contrary to Christian order',⁴⁶ but also heresy and infidelity must be fought by spiritual weapons. Furthermore, Luther refuses to let corrupt Christendom off the Turkish hook. Only by repentance and prayer can the divine sting of the Turkish menace be drawn, leaving it solely as a military invasion to be dealt with by the emperor. Luther is here carefully separating out the holy war, which is to be fought only by spiritual weapons, and the just war involving lawful military action, and at the same time keeping apart the callings of Christian ministers and rulers. The two campaigns are nevertheless connected, for Luther would not have the imperial forces repulse the Turkish threat until the Church had, by humbling itself in penitence, felt the scourge of this divinely appointed chastisement. If that happened, even the military might of the Turks would be sapped, for its diabolical power would be destroyed.

But this was not the whole story, for as Luther became more confident of the repulse of the Turks, so he came to interpret their overthrow in apocalyptic terms derived from Daniel 7.⁴⁷ Final victory was assured by prophecy, and would indeed be the Last Battle of Armageddon itself. Therefore, to join the emperor's army became the supreme Christian calling, and Luther seemed at risk of promising Christians who might face death or capture in such a conflict the kind of spiritual rewards offered to combatants in papal crusades!⁴⁸ This was, one might say, another

⁴⁴ See the article by Buchanan cited in n.21 above.

⁴⁵ Translated by C. M. Jacobs and R. C. Schultz in *Luther's Works*, vol.46, 155-205. See in particular 184-185, 165, 166, 171.

⁴⁶ Buchanan, *art. cit.*, 154.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 155-159.

⁴⁸ 'To fight for the emperor was not only a Christian duty, it provided the means of salvation as well. In such warfare there need be no fear of death and its consequences; it was "a hundred thousand times better" to die an obedient Christian than to risk life under the Turk. Death by such a martyrdom, said

kind of holy war, in which a military campaign was taken up into the eschatological fulfilment of history, when pope and Turk alike — Luther always linked them together — would be cast down.

This is an appropriate point to switch to Calvin, if Michael Walzer and other scholars are to be believed in finding in Calvin himself the roots of the war of the saints for a holy commonwealth associated with militant Calvinist minorities in France, the Netherlands, Scotland and England.⁴⁹ But how far Calvin himself should bear the credit or the blame for this European-wide development is a matter for debate. It is undeniable that he became implicated in the Huguenot military resistance in France in the last years of his life. But Calvinists in several countries who constructed a case for a 'just rebellion' (which is but a variant of the just war) had little more than the odd hint in Calvin himself to build upon. By this theory inferior magistrates (or in France 'princes of the blood') might legitimately overthrow an oppressive ruler.

But Walzer is unconvincing in making out that Calvin in various ways promoted the new generation of holy wars, charging the elect saints with a role in battle which rested solely on orders from God and could, if necessary, override the established conventions of just war. The relentless imagery of warfare with the devil in Calvin's writings is irrelevant.⁵⁰ (It is far more pervasive and fervent in Luther.) Certainly Calvin's deliberate

Luther, is a privilege: "Heaven is yours, there is no doubt about it" (*ibid.*, 158-159).

⁴⁹ Cf. Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints* (London, 1966), especially 57-65; Bainton, *op. cit.*, 144-147.

⁵⁰ *Op. cit.*, 64-65. He implies that it facilitated the transition to active militancy. In 'Exodus 32 and the Theory of Holy War: the History of a Citation', *Harv. Theol. Rev.* 61, 1968, 1-14, Walzer compares interpretations of Exod. 32:26-28, where, without a command from God, punishment was inflicted on orders from an angry Moses by human agents, the Levites, who at the time had 'no defined political or religious position'. Augustine imagined the slaughter of the idolaters as a benevolent act of coercion by Moses viewed as a Roman magistrate; Aquinas, uneasy with crusading fervour, treated it as an act of God setting no precedent for the future; Calvin, 'eager for battle and willing to set the saints loose from secular control, saw it as an example of zealous activity by a band of saints free from earthly and natural law, instruments of the divine will'. Walzer's reconstruction is built for Augustine on a very narrow base (one line in *Letter* 93:6) and for Calvin turns out on examination to be without foundation. This is not surprising when Walzer admits (12 n.22) that Calvin's fullest exposition of the passage (in *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, Edinburgh 1852-5, vol.3, 351-356) is irrelevant, 'since Calvin is not citing the passage in the course of an argument, but expounding it in detail'.

discussions of the principles of warfare offer little explicit justification for the wars of the Calvinist saints.⁵¹ He does however say in the *Institutes* that 'Christ by his coming has changed nothing' in respect of war (4:20:12). His tendency to place Old and New Testament on a par in matters of this kind had the effect of suggesting that the wars of Joshua were not irrelevant to Christian times. At times he explicitly drew contemporary lessons from such warfare,⁵² and his comments on these campaigns display that merciless consistency in the interests of theodicy and biblical harmonization that makes even his most ardent admirers wince.⁵³ But when on occasion he accepts that the military operations of Israel did not observe even the stipulations of just warfare laid down by the pagan Cicero, he does not erect them into a precedent for all time. God's command to Moses in Deut. 20:12-15 to kill all the male inhabitants of captured cities provokes from Calvin the following comment:

'The permission here given seems to confer too great a license; for, since heathen writers command even the conquered to be spared, and enjoin that those should be admitted to mercy who lay down their arms . . . ,⁵⁴ how does God, the Father of mercies, give his sanction to indiscriminate bloodshed? . . . More was conceded to the Jews on account of their hardness of heart than was justly lawful for them. Unquestionably, by the law of charity, even armed men should be spared, if, casting away the sword, they crave for mercy; at any rate it was not lawful to kill any but those who were taken in arms, and sword in hand. This permission, therefore, to slaughter, which is extended to all males, is far distant, from perfection [and from the equity which ought to be in all God's children — addition in French]. But although in their ferocity the Jews would have hardly suffered the perfection of equity to be prescribed to them, still God would at least restrain their excessive violence from proceeding to the extrem-

⁵¹ *Institutes* 4:20:10-12.

⁵² Cf. *Joshua* (*op. cit.*, n.53 below), 125, on Josh. 8:15, justifying 'wiles and stratagem' as 'usual methods of conquering'.

⁵³ In his *Commentaries on the Book of Joshua*, tr. H. Beveridge (*Calvin Translation Society*, Edinburgh, 1854), 173-174, he resolves the apparent conflict between Josh. 11:19 and Deut. 7:2 as follows: 'the Israelites, though they were forbidden to show them any mercy, were met in a hostile manner, in order that the war might be just. And it was wonderfully arranged by the secret providence of God, that, being doomed to destruction, they should voluntarily offer themselves to it, and by provoking the Israelites be the cause of their own ruin'.

⁵⁴ Here Calvin quotes Cicero, *De Officiis* 1:11:35 — see n.25 above.

ity of cruelty . . . , since they might not kill either women or children.⁵⁵

The effect of this remarkable statement, which is by no means unparalleled in Calvin's commentary on his Pentateuchal harmony, is immediately spoiled by what he has to say about the ensuing command in Deut. 20:16-17 to 'save alive nothing that breathes' in the cities of the Canaanites and other peoples. In this case 'God had not only armed the Jews to carry on war with them, but had appointed them to be the ministers and executioners of his vengeance', for there were 'just causes' for their extermination. Hence it was acceptable that 'the Jews should not apply the common laws of war to the Canaanitish nations'.⁵⁶

But it is not in this territory that we should look for Calvin's contribution to Calvinist militancy in the Wars of Religion. It probably lies elsewhere in his teaching and activity, not least in that close mutuality of the distinct callings of minister and magistrate in Calvinist communities. Each within his own sphere had a God-given commission to ensure the fulfilment of God's will against all opposition, but in the last resort it was the minister who instructed the magistrate in the will of God. Thus ministers of the Word exercised an actively, even militantly, prophetic role, to whom magistrates must give fearful heed like the godly kings of Israel and Judah.

So in the Wars of Religion the holy war reared its head yet again in the long tradition of Christian endorsement of war. If this historical survey shows anything, it is the necessity for hermeneutical sobriety. One may well have to conclude that the Bible offers little secure teaching on war for nations that cannot be regarded as the special people of God. Such a conclusion smacks of biblical minimalism. It is arguably, from a Church-historical perspective, far less perilous than the opposite extreme.

⁵⁵ *Harmony*, vol.3, 53. Calvin uses the same argument on other occasions in this commentary. In his laws and instructions God did as well as he could with the recalcitrant human material of Israel but nevertheless less than perfection or the principle of 'equity' would require.

⁵⁶ *Harmony*, vol.3, 53-54. Commenting on Joshua 11:12 Calvin says, 'Joshua did not give loose reins to his passion, when he slew all from the least to the greatest . . . It is just as if he had placed his hands at the disposal of God, when he destroyed these nations according to his command', but he immediately warns that this is no warrant for any imitation of Joshua (*Commentaries* . . . , 170).

George L. Carey

Biblical-Theological Perspectives on War and Peace

My concern in this paper is to take a further look at the biblical material which has already been discussed by my colleagues in their papers on the Old and New Testaments, to consider the material theologically, and to discuss the hermeneutical approaches and interpretations of some recent theologians.

The framework of my paper is as follows:-

1. Under the heading of 'Yahweh — a warrior God' we shall glance at the theme of war in the Old Testament.
2. We shall then go on to consider the impact of Jesus' teaching under the title of 'Jesus and the New Age'.
3. Moving into the Early Church we shall consider the position of the Christian as a citizen of two communities.
4. We shall then jump forward to modern times to reflect on the contributions of some modern theologians.
5. Finally, I shall offer some thoughts on what I consider to be 'constituent elements of a Christian doctrine of peace'.

I. Yahweh — a Warrior God

The Old Testament presents us with a picture of God who not only fights for his people but who also demands that they fight for his law and his cause. The Israelites are seen at first as a poor, oppressed and weak minority dominated by a tyrannous ruling majority who exact from them a bondage so harsh that flight is the only solution. Yahweh fights for them single-handedly and delivers them from the hand of their enemy. Through this major event of deliverance they are made a people for Yahweh's possession and a covenant is established which binds them to him in a close personal relationship of love.

'If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exodus 19:5, 6)

Their journey towards the Promised Land and their eventual possession of it inevitably brought them into conflict with other peoples.

‘Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perrizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites’ (Exod. 33:2)

We must not allow the familiar words to dull our sensitivities to the destruction, pillaging and brutality which always accompany war and the overthrow of another nation. Israel is seen as a nation advancing to its goal which entails from time to time the complete annihilation of the enemy including women, children and animals.

‘Then they utterly destroyed all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep and asses with the edge of the sword. So the Lord was with Joshua . . .’ (Judges 6:17)

The nature of Israel’s relationship to Yahweh seen in terms of total commitment led her to embrace the concept of the ‘herem’ as far as war is concerned. Destruction of entire peoples and their pagan worship was the only way to ensure the purity of Yahwistic faith and the nation’s walk with God.

But it is important, I think, to observe three hermeneutical elements in this picture of a conquering people.

First, the ‘herem-war’ or any war is viewed not as Man’s victory but as God’s. His hand gives the victory even when it seemed that the Israelites had won the battle themselves. Thus Moses raises his hands in prayer at the battle of Rephidim and victory comes to the people of God. Gideon leads his picked men into battle but not until God had whittled the band down to a derisory 300 men to take on an army described as ‘locusts for number’ (Judges 7). The point of this apparent folly, from a human perspective, is to ram home the point that Israel is not fighting for God but that God is fighting for Israel. The essential point of such narratives lies in the intended testimony to the might of Yahweh. And, on the contrary, when Israel attempts to go to war in her own strength, she fails. So in Numbers 14:41ff, Moses warns the people against fighting the Amalekites because ‘the Lord is not among you’. Disobedience to this warning results in a resounding defeat.

The second observation builds on the point just made — Yahweh is pictured as a warrior who goes into battle and fights for his people. Reference is even made in the Old Testament to a source ‘The book of the wars of Yahweh’ (Numbers 21:14). The concept of deliverance with the motif of Yahweh the warrior and the Yahweh wars dominate much of the Old Testament. We find it in Samuel’s farewell speech (1 Samuel 12:6) and other historical resumes (Ezekiel 20:6-10). The Psalms likewise celebrate and record God’s intervention ((Psalm 78: especially v.55; 136). Here,

I suggest, we are contemplating something quite significant in God's character. A. E. Martens in *Plot and Purpose in the Old Testament* agrees and argues that the motif of Yahweh as a warrior is important not only for Israel but for all who trust in him:

'The struggle with evil, then as now, is no myth. There is someone, Yahweh the warrior, who is set as a force against evil. The shape of evil may change but the combat between God and the powers of evil continues.'

(p.62)¹

According to Martens, therefore, the concept of Yahweh as warrior is more than analogy — it is a description of God's nature and mission.

My third observation is that 'holy-wars' or 'herem-wars' are not ends in themselves but to bring about the fulfilment of God's promise — the land. Breuggemann is correct to note the centrality of the 'land' in Israel's dreams and theology. 'Land', he states, 'is a central if not the central theme of biblical faith.' (*The Land*, p.3)² He means by this that biblical faith is the pursuit of historical 'belonging' that includes a sense of destiny derived from such a possession. He traces the themes of 'land', 'landlessness', 'home and homelessness' in an evocative study of land as promise and problem and the way it is spiritualized in the New Testament. It is difficult not to agree with Breuggemann that the possession of the land makes a nation of the people of God. Her 'herem-wars' were designed to pave the way for the fulfilment of her destiny. Her expansion, unlike, say, Hitler's, was not dominated by greed or by the desire to exploit for the sake of a superior race, but by the conviction that the land was hers by right. She was not taking land that belonged to another but merely entering into her inheritance.

The land also clarifies Israel's self-consciousness as a theocratic nation. 'Blessed is the people whose God is the Lord'. Acquisition of the promise meant that the pilgrim people settled down in a possessed land which led to momentous changes in patterns of life. Even faith itself is now focussed upon established icons which are seen as signs of God's blessing upon his people and conveying the sense of reality with them — a city, a temple and a cultus. This, of course, leads to a significant change in attitude to war. It is now no longer necessary to attack in order to possess

¹ A. E. Martens, *Plot and Purpose in the Old Testament* (IVP 1981).

² W. Brueggemann, *The Land* (SPCK 1978).

but rather that *she must now defend* in order to keep what is hers as a gift.

Before we turn to consider the New Testament we should observe the strand noticeable in the prophets that to trust in Man's might is a precarious defence for a people who claim that the Lord is their God. The Lord is the only true defender of Israel. Chariots, horsemen and the power of Man attract more sarcasm from the prophets than practically anything else (2 Kings 6; Isaiah 30:31).

II. Jesus and the New Age

A biblical theologian approaching the New Testament after considering the Old Testament approach to war is struck by the apparent discontinuity between the Testaments. The Old Covenant with its tight identity expressed in land, law and nation is succeeded by a New Covenant delineated by Kingdom, grace and people. It is not simply that the three-fold Old Testament emphasis is spiritualized but, rather, that it is transposed into a higher order of being through the momentous impact of Jesus of Nazareth. In him a new age has dawned, and God's salvation broadens out from Israel to take in the whole world. Now this, I argue, is a most important hermeneutical shift. A gospel which takes in the whole of humanity will have staggering implications for relationships between individuals and society.

Let me pick out a number of elements which bear on our theme from this transposition of land to Kingdom; law to grace; and nation to people.

First, *land to Kingdom* moves God's salvation in Christ to all mankind. It is no longer localised in a particular place but is ever-present to all who confess Christ. This Kingdom is both present and future and located in the hearts of men and in the company of the faithful. This concept of the Kingdom enabled the Jesus-people of the New Testament to rise above the narrow nationalism of their day to embrace a unity which is eager to draw all mankind into the love of God. This made the early Christians a disconcerting bunch. Their exclusive faith centring in the finality of salvation in Christ had an inclusive focus — no-one was excluded. A radical Gospel, then, with radical consequences. So Paul outlines the nature of his universal Gospel: 'There is no Jew nor Gentile, bond or free, male or female — for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28).

Second, *law to grace* moves God's salvation away from a man-centred obedience to a Gospel which is cross-shaped and grace-

centred. Not only does God's love dominate the Christian life but love for others is the heart of Christian lifestyle. Indeed Jesus challenges the accepted teaching of his day:

'You have heard that it was said: "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" but I say to you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.' (Mt. 5:38, 44)

Not only is love commanded but non-violence is required from the Christian who walks Christ's way. 'Do not resist . . . turn the other cheek . . . give your cloak as well as your coat . . . walk two miles when you are compelled to walk one . . .'. (Mt. 5:39-41)

Of course, this is *much* more than meek resignation. Jesus is talking about turning non-violence into an actual challenge to evil. Going that extra mile and responding beyond what is asked will have the effect of challenging evil and drawing attention to the power of good. But whatever its intended effect the message coming across is that the way of non-violence is the goal of any follower of Jesus. But Jesus did not merely teach it — he lived it and took that way of life right to the cross. A genuine 'theologia crucis' will not be simply limited to atonement theories but will affect a Christian's social behaviour as 1 Peter 2 makes plain.

Third, when we study the links between the *nation* of Israel to the people known as the *Body of Christ* so we find ourselves considering the transposition of a nation finding its identity in the law to a people finding it in Christ. 'Jesus is Lord'. Three simple words, but with what momentous and radical consequences for anyone who said and says them! They called people to a simple yet absolute loyalty which was to have fearful implications for them, especially when the demands of following Jesus clashed with those of the State.

So far we have observed little which directly relates to war although a great deal relates to peace and its quality. Yet in this teaching we may see those elements which clearly bear on our subject and which may be regarded as constituent elements of a doctrine of war and peace. We shall be considering this in a little more detail later but in the meantime we note: the Christian belongs to a Kingdom which transcends all earthly kingdoms; he belongs to a people whose allegiance is to Jesus, Lord of all; and he is bound by an ethic of love which compels him to call any human being his friend and brother.

III. Citizens of Two Communities

The scene is now set for an explosive confrontation. If a

Christian's commitment to Jesus Christ binds him body and soul to his Lord, the demands of a totalitarian regime may place upon the believer an intolerable choice — Christ or Caesar. We see the issues appearing in three texts in the New Testament: Romans 13:1-7; the First Epistle of Peter; and the Apocalypse. We shall look closely at the first passage and only very briefly at the other two.

Romans 13:1-7 says nothing at all directly about war but it does have some important things to say about the attitude of the Christian to the State. It is most unlikely that the passage is simply expressing Paul's passing and casual thought on a topic which happened to be in his mind at the time. He is considering a question which was of the greatest practical importance for the Early Church — what ought to be the attitude of Christians to the ruling powers? Jewish Christians would have felt this issue most keenly. Jewish nationalism was running very strongly at the time of writing and the unrest must have rippled through the Christian fellowships.

We note that Paul's discussion of the relationship between the State and the Christian citizen is rooted in his teaching about social relationships generally set forth in chapter 12. In a passage reminiscent of the Sermon on the Mount, Paul appeals that the way of love should govern all we say and do. 'Let love be genuine' (v.9) . . . 'hate what is evil . . . love one another with a brotherly affection . . . bless those who persecute you . . . repay no-one for evil . . . don't avenge yourself but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written: "Vengeance is mine — I will repay" says the Lord . . . do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.' Here, then, coming back to us strongly is the love ethic of Jesus — we should not overcome evil with its equal but with meekness, peace and goodness.

Romans 13:1-7 does not contradict this teaching but rather establishes it in the social and political realm. But we must observe that Paul is able to make these apparently meek statements about obedience to the State because the Christian has a primary allegiance to a greater power. 'There is no authority (*ἐξουσία*) except from God and those that exist have been instituted by God (v.1). Political authorities have a real and positive value in the eyes of God because they have an accepted place in the providential order which he has established for the good of mankind. We must at this point part company with Paul Ziesler's interpretation of the passage. He interprets Paul's injunctions solely in the light of the Parousia. 'There can be no thought of refashioning social structures which are in process of

passing away' he declares.³ So the Christian lives within the present society as a quiet and law-abiding citizen as part of his Christian obedience.

It is perfectly true that Paul reminds his readers of the fullness of salvation to come (v.11) but I suggest that Romans 13:1-7 is not setting forth a temporary expedient but is rooted in the Old Testament conviction that God is the ruler of all nations and of all history. Strangers they may be to Christian revelation but no good earthly power is outside the control of God's providential will. Paul indeed strongly emphasises this in vs.1f, by the repetition of the verb 'to establish'. No government, he is saying, is outside God's ordering or beyond his power to be used as the agent of the divine will.

So then, for this earthly life we are subject to civil powers because of the need for order and organization. Verse 2 is the corollary of the opening verse. If the higher powers are God-appointed, to resist them is to defy God and incur his wrath. Here we find the possibility of the 'demonisation' of the State — when it arrogates to itself the divine name and will. But the following verses correct the balance and establish the positive and negative aspects of the State's authority.

Positively, the purpose and value of civil government is to support causes of right, to promote the good and to enforce a just retribution on wrong-doing. Verse 5 reinforces this point: the Christian submits to a system of justice which is an aspect of God's will for his world. What we cannot read clearly from the passage is whether Paul considers it right for that punishment upon evil to include the taking-up of arms against a defiant and rebellious tribe or people. To infer that the passage is merely talking about the individual in community is, I suggest, not the most natural reading of it.

Negatively, verse 4 leaves open the door for criticism of the State when it forsakes its role as a servant (*διάκονος*) for good. Paul's whole attention is, of course, upon the State as fulfilling God's plan for it in building up the life of its citizens. But the implication may be fairly drawn, I think, that the State which forsakes its proper role and becomes a tyrant, forfeits its role to be obeyed. There is certainly no call here for unconditional obedience. Paul would have been horrified by such an inference. His concentration is upon the *lawful* role of those who rule. We are not given help here or anywhere else in Scripture concerning the question: If the Christian is forced to disobey the civil

³ J. Ziesler, *Pauline Christianity* (OUP 1983), p.119.

authorities, to what extent should resistance be carried? Is violence always wrong?

The other two texts we shall glance at in passing. 1 Peter 2:13 reveals a different atmosphere from that of Romans 13. Gone are the cordial relationships of civil life prior to the persecutions of AD 64, whereas in 1 Peter we meet a church experiencing the pain of being the church of the Crucified. Astonishingly, from a worldly point of view the readers are expected to honour and obey the emperor who represents the forces which are threatening to crush the first Christian communities. The Christian attitude, says Peter, is to see the cross of Jesus as an example of suffering obedience and steadfast exposure to evil. That is the way to live, he exhorts.

The Apocalypse moves the relationship between Church and Roman Empire into a deeper level of hostility and conflict. All pretence at live and let live is now gone. The Empire is evil and its doom is foretold. In this book the note is struck again of God as a warrior who enters the fray on behalf of his people or, rather, who sends Michael and the forces of good to beat down evil under his feet.

The dilemma which faced the early Christians, and which faces all Christians who attempt to wrestle with the obligations of being a Christian and a citizen, is how far do we go in following the injunctions of the State? We have, indeed, no abiding city. We are citizens of a greater Kingdom and we share a brotherhood with people of all races and tribes. Nevertheless, we are still men and women of particular nations as far as this life is concerned and feel the pull of this affiliation. Insofar as the theme of war is concerned, what attitude does Scripture tell us to adopt? Let us consider two quite different approaches to the question.

First of all we have a Lutheran two-Kingdom theology which separates the Christian responsibility to the kingdoms of this world from that of Christ. Anders Nygren's commentary on Romans confirms this approach although I am not charging him with representing a classical viewpoint here.⁴ However, I believe that his exegesis leads logically to the two kingdoms concept. Why should Paul speak so appreciatively of the State and its functions? asks Nygren. Could it be that he would have altered his view after persecution began? No, contends Nygren. Paul's attitude to the State is part of Paul's total theology. The apostle is setting forth the basic Christian view about worldly government. So far we are in agreement. But then Nygren goes on to separate

⁴ A. Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (SCM 1952).

the demands of the two aeons. In this provisional world the Christian has to live his life and within it he is subject to the earthly ruler, who is the servant of God in this aeon of wrath. This submission is not merely external, but *internal*. The Kingdom of this world is ordained of God and must be obeyed because this is God's will. Although Nygren does not deduce from this an ethical dualism the implication is there as Leenhardt in his commentary makes clear. Leenhardt criticizes Nygren for overlooking that the role of all government is for — τὸ ἀγαθόν — the good of communal life.⁵ By ignoring this qualifying distinction Nygren assumes that the Christian submits to authority in all events. Yet even if Nygren has not worked out a fully-fledged ethical dualism, others have followed Luther's two Kingdom teaching — that the love ethic of Jesus applies to the individual lives of Christians only, whereas as a member of this aeon of wrath he may be required to do things in public life which he could not possibly contemplate as an individual. There does not seem to be much justification for this exegesis. There is nothing in Romans 12-13 to suggest that when Paul moves from the private and personal areas of Christian living in chapter 12, into the political arena of life in chapter 13 that his command to love, honour and to be at peace are rescinded. Surely not: there is a unity in Paul's teaching. Although he has a clear conception of two aeons making their demands on the Christian, the ethics of Christ's Kingdom dominate and affect the way we live now in this life.

But how do we respond to another interpretation — this time the complete opposite of the sharp dualism of the two-Kingdom theology? We take as an example of this the pacifist interpretation of R. Sider and R. K. Taylor in *Nuclear Holocaust and Christian Hope*.⁶ Sider and Taylor reject the dualism of the classical Lutheran position as I do but put in its place an argument for a rejection for all forms of violence. 'Christians', they argue, 'ought to forsake the diverse dualistic ethical systems developed since the Fourth Century and return to Jesus' teaching in non-retaliatory, suffering love.' There is much in this approach that I find attractive. The way of the Christ we follow is indeed the pathway of suffering love. He commanded Peter to put up his sword; he went willingly to his cross: he did teach his disciples not to retaliate.

⁵ Leenhardt, *Commentary on Romans*

⁶ R. Sider and R. K. Taylor, *Nuclear Holocaust and Christian Hope* (Hodder 1982), p.135.

But attractive though this approach may be there are some searching hermeneutical questions which reveal, I believe, that Sider and Taylor are not as biblical as they think they are.

First, can we be sure that Jesus' teaching about non-violence can be absolutized in this way? We have to ask what was the original setting of the sayings in Matthew 5-7 and on what basis may we apply a saying to the life of the Church in society. Jesus is clearly forbidding his disciples to indulge in personal retaliation, which is something of universal and timeless application. But does it mean that we should never use force or violence if a child is attacked, a woman raped, a helpless person cruelly treated? There is, of course, always the danger of asking of the New Testament questions about which it was not concerned, and I, together with Sider and Taylor, may be falling into this trap. But I think my point is made: I don't think Jesus' teaching rules out forceful intervention to protect the innocent and defend right.⁷

Second, even if Sider and Taylor reject the ethical dualism of Luther, are they not replacing it with another dualism — a social dualism in which church and society are separated by alien ideologies? I mean by this that Sider and Taylor appear to be suggesting that the Christian has a total theological perspective which always rules out certain actions. This implies that political and social questions have little to say to the theological perspectives and, indeed, are not at all theological.

Thirdly, Sider and Taylor show some ambiguity in their interpretation of the notion of punishment. In their interpretation of Romans 13:1-7 they indeed allow a proper role for *disciplinary* punishment but not for retributive punishment. Leaving aside the question whether Paul's notion of punishment in Romans 13 is not primarily retributive anyway, we must ask: what is the nature of 'disciplinary' punishment on an international scale? What does one do when an aggressive people runs through a Kingdom and threatens to destroy a way of life? What is the role of disciplinary love then?

IV. Pacifism and Just War Theories

The Bible then appears to leave us with a number of unresolved questions concerning war and peace. The Early Church, as far as we can deduce from the evidence, rejected the use of force, although it is unclear whether it did so because it believed it was following the clear, unequivocal commands of Jesus to walk the

⁷ See discussion in N. Anderson, *The Teaching of Jesus* (Hodder 1983), ch.6.

way of love, or whether this ethic flowed from a rejection of a pagan world and its values. What we do find, however, is that in the post-Constantine period, the Church's attitude underwent a transformation. Perhaps it was the politics of power which led it to assume the inevitability of violence to settle certain differences between communities. Sider and Taylor view this as a sad decline from non-violence to violence and from suffering, costly love to retribution. But are they correct in putting it in such terms? Are the issues that clear and certain?

In order to answer this I would like to compare the contributions of two other writers, Jean Lassere and John Macquarrie.

Jean Lassere in *War and the Gospel* has written one of the most powerful Christian pacifist books of modern times.⁸ Written in 1962 at the very point when it was beginning to dawn on us all what were the consequences of living in the nuclear age, it is a forthright and powerful denunciation of the use of force.

In chapter 3 Lassere calls upon the Church to reject the traditional doctrine which he expresses in the following way: God has charged the Church with the duty of preaching the Gospel and the State with ensuring the stability of the political order. The Christian is a member of both Church and nation; as to the former he obeys God by conforming to the Gospel ethic, as to the latter he conforms to the political order. As with the two-Kingdom ethic, the distinction between private and public morality opens up. In his personal life the Christian respects the Gospel teaching and in his public life he respects the law of the land. Obedience to 'call-up', to support the defences of the nation and assume the right of the militia, all flow from this is Lassere's conclusion. Jean Lassere's logic leads him to reject this traditional morality which grew up in the post-Constantine period and he urges the Christian churches to abandon a theology which he believes to be profoundly un-Christian and un-biblical. Inevitably the argument leads him to embrace whole-heartedly the pacifist position fully recognizing where it might lead the Christian, perhaps even to the concentration camp. Quoting Horace: 'Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori', he asks, 'but why should it be more glorious to be dismembered by a bomb than to die in a concentration camp where up to the last minute you can keep the inward attitude of a man and render Christian witness? Which is more glorious from the point of view of the Gospel? Christ and the apostles died as brave victims of totalitarianism, but not with weapons in their hands.' 'It may', continues Lassere,

⁸ Jean Lassere, *War and the Gospel* (J. Clarke 1962).

'lead to your country being overrun and dominated by a hated regime. A systematic non-violent resistance, including civil disobedience, in short, non-collaboration with the invader seems a means more moral, more 'manly' (in its truest sense), more compatible with the Christian faith.'⁹

Two points spring to mind. First, in Lassere's theology at this point social ethics and the gospel are one. Ethics flow from the gospel. If 'Christ died for all', then I cannot possibly take up arms to fight against my brother or sister. For Lassere also our ethics have evangelical consequences — they may either draw attention to our values or contradict them.

One must acknowledge that a great deal can be said for this viewpoint. It contradicts the 'rather dead than red' retort. Lord Chalfont, for example, stated in 1980: 'There can be nothing — nothing — worse than a life in which by the exercise of relentless tyranny, the precious gifts of liberty and dignity are denied.' Lassere would have replied to this, and I am sure quite correctly, that denial of dignity and liberty are not the most fundamental or ultimate of things. There is something far worse than being deprived of freedom: it is living without faith, hope and peace in your heart. We can look at the Eastern Bloc countries, particularly Poland, and see that Communism has not been successfully imposed on people everywhere. 'But the pacifist thesis may lead the Church to the Cross?' asks Lassere. 'It certainly will', he replies, 'it might also lead the Church to glory, whereas today, its Gospel falsified, the Church is without the Cross and without glory.'¹⁰

John Macquarrie, however, finds difficulty with the pacifist position. In his book *The Concept of Peace*¹¹ he deals with the moral ambiguity we face as Christians. He points out that there is no clear universally-accepted teaching on the subject. On the one hand there is a long tradition of pacifism and non-violence and yet, on the other hand, another tradition which, while not encouraging violence, deems it permissible in certain circumstances. Macquarrie admits that he finds himself on the opposite side to pacifism and argues that Christianity means living in a tension with the world: 'And it is impossible to do this without in some way participating in the corporate sins of the world, including its violence'.¹² Are there guidelines to help us answer

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p.211.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p.218.

¹¹ J. Macquarrie, *The Concept of Peace* (SCM 1973).

¹² *Op. cit.*, p.59.

the agonizing question as to when and under what circumstances it might ever be right to fight?

Macquarrie falls back on the traditional Just War doctrine as formulated by Thomas Aquinas. Reference has already been made to it but briefly it is:

1. Just cause
2. War must be a last resort
3. A lawful authority
4. A feasible goal
5. Means must be appropriate to the end
6. Reconciliation to be eventual outcome.

I don't want to discuss the Just War theory but I want to point out that it, or something very much like it, is the only reasonable alternative to pacifism as a response to the war/peace dilemma at least as far as conventional warfare is concerned. Deny this framework and all we have left is a number of 'ad hoc' comments from different Christian theologians or different parts of the Christian tradition.

Perhaps now we should return to our earlier question: was the non-pacifist position which developed in the Church as Christianity strengthened its hold on society a proper and reasonable interpretation of the Gospel or a regressive slump into a worldly morality concerned with the survival of the 'status quo'?

I do not share Sider's view that it is the latter, neither am I asserting that the Church's traditional doctrine has always been a proper interpretation of the Gospel. What I do find, however, is the complexity of applying the teaching of the Christian faith to the situations in which we find ourselves. It is worth noting that the Just War theory completely abandons the attempt to apply biblical principles to its logic. Indeed, it was not even in the first instance a theological construction — it was derived from the classical world of Greece and Rome and was dressed up in Christian language by the medieval theologians. This does not make it a wrong or necessarily a bad construct — the point I am stressing is that it is primarily a *political* theory.

Nowhere better is the dilemma seen than in the life and teachings of D. Bonhoeffer. Macquarrie sets him forth as an answer to the question: 'Can revolutionary views ever be justified from a Christian point of view?'¹³ From our point of view Bonhoeffer is of great interest because, as we shall see in a moment, he is of major importance to both writers — Lassere and Macquarrie.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, p.60.

The tragic irony of Bonhoeffer is that this man of peace was forced by his theology as well as by his love for people to join in an attempt on Hitler's life. An act he paid for with his life. Yet Bonhoeffer's theology rested in the radical nature of discipleship of which the Sermon on the Mount was its compelling peak. Of formative importance to Bonhoeffer's development was the year 1930 which he spent in the Union Theological Seminary, New York, as an exchange student. An enduring friendship began with a French Reformed student named Jean Lassere. Lassere was already an ardent pacifist whereas Bonhoeffer was not. Through Lassere Bonhoeffer was prompted to take the Sermon on the Mount as a concrete command to the Christian. According to his biographer, Eberhard Bethge, 'Not that Bonhoeffer immediately became a convinced pacifist — in fact he never did so — but, after meeting Lassere, the question of the concrete answer to the biblical injunction of peace and that of the concrete steps to be taken against warlike impulses never left him again.'¹⁴ Through Lassere's challenge to him and through his own study of discipleship, Bonhoeffer struggled with the theme of peace throughout his life and ministry. It is, as I said earlier, the tragic irony that Bonhoeffer who was so strongly led into the ways of peace should end his life violently because he took up weapons of violence. In becoming a partner to the conspiracy he turned his back on the way of peace.

John Macquarrie sees Bonhoeffer's action as a legitimate expression of the Just War idea.¹⁵ Maybe. Yet it seems to me that Bonhoeffer's example is more that of showing the dilemma of the Christian who is caught up in the more difficult task of balancing his response as a Christian and as a citizen. Where pacifism fails — and I believe Bonhoeffer serves to illustrate that it does so fail — is in its ultimate action in withdrawing from the situation. In a sinful, fallen world the Christian Church does not stand outside the sinful structures of society as a holy and inviolable people but is also caught up in the struggles of a world searching for law and order and peace. In many, many cases violence is wrong — but I don't think we can say categorically that it is always wrong.

V. The Way of Peace

There is, I suggest, a certain irony in the fact that we are studying the theme of war when the Bible gives us practically no teaching

¹⁴ E. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Collins 1970), p.112.

¹⁵ J. Macquarrie, *The Concept of Peace* (SCM 1973), p.59.

on it whatever! Instead it concentrates upon peace. Yet even with this difference of emphasis we may observe something very fundamental about human nature. War is something which springs from what we are. At this moment there are over twenty local wars going on in different parts of the globe. Rather than war being exceptional, it is peace which is unusual and exceptional. The 'ubiquity of war in the Old Testament', which I believe was Derek Kidner's phrase, is also true of our contemporary situation. Another factor of which I believe we need to be reminded is the awfulness and horror of war. It is all too easy for us to talk about it in the harmony and peace of a conference, but now we need to remind ourselves of its terrifying consequences, especially when we think of the effects of nuclear warfare. Whether we are pacifists or not we Christians must be a voice and a conscience in society and should unite against this terror.

Even though I must reject those noble attempts to convince me that pacifism is the only natural deduction to draw from the New Testament, that is, if we are talking about conventional warfare, I share with this approach a strong desire that the church should rediscover its role as a peace maker in society. There are a number of elements of great importance which the church must live out and speak out.

First, we must rediscover what it is to be people of the Cross. The Cross is for us the primary fact of reconciliation. 'Christ is our Peace who has made us one and broken down the dividing way of hostility' (Eph. 2:14). I would not go as far as Sider and Taylor in making the Cross a foundational theological principle for non-violence (p.142) because that was clearly not its primary purpose, but it is difficult not to agree that the Cross is more than a theological idea — it is something we have to take up and embrace. The 'Imitatio Christi' doctrine is, as Moltmann points out, an important theological motif in discipleship down the ages and, surely, we need to rediscover it in our own day. What is it to take up one's cross as an oppressed Christian in El Salvador or South Africa? How is evil to be resisted and overcome when it threatens the lives of many through oppression, violence and pain? At what point does the conflict take one over the line from passive disobedience to active disobedience? And most terrible of all, at what point does the conflict lead us to take up arms to overthrow a regime? Academic questions to us maybe, but not such to many Christians in our world.

Second, the Christian Church conveys that important element of hope. The Church is the Church of the Resurrection which proclaims God's victory — a victory which will one day become a

reality to the whole of creation when Christ returns in glory. This relates to our world in one important way. A people without external hope will be all the more afraid when it is threatened with extinction. It has to defend itself at all costs because it has nothing beyond its own traditions and values. As Keith Clements point out in his recent *A Patriotism for Today*¹⁶ fear drives a nation to make its boundaries as secure as possible. 'The desire to negotiate from strength means that in order to have something to bargain with, one must go to the conference table outwardly desiring peace but all the time trying to ensure that one is more powerfully armed than one's opponent'.¹⁷ The escalation of arms is, therefore, inevitable. Fear and lack of trust are bed-fellows.

The Christian Church must sound clearly the note of hope, that God has acted in Christ and that Man cannot and shall not have the last word in God's world.

The last element I would place in a Christian doctrine of peace is one I mentioned much earlier which we spotted in the Old Testament and also in the Revelation of St. John: Yahweh the warrior God who fights for his people and his world. So Psalm 44 strikes the right chord for the Christian who knows that the battle is the Lord's:

'Thou art my King and my God,
 who ordainest victories for Jacob.
 Thro' thee we push down our foes;
 thro' thy name we tread down our assailants.
 For not in my bow I trust,
 nor can my sword save me.
 But thou has saved us from our foes
 and has put to confusion those who hate us.
 In God we have boasted continually
 and we will give thanks to thy name for ever.'

¹⁶ Keith Clements, *A Patriotism for Today* (Bristol Baptist College 1984).

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, p.121.